



Journey

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to the Bereaved

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GIVE THE GIFT OF DYING WELL TO YOUR LOVED ONES

by *Betsy Knestrick*

Rabindranath Tagore in "Stray Birds" states, "Death belongs to life as birth does. The walk is in the raising of the foot as in laying it down." Our western culture has such a difficult time preparing well for death, and yet this is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children and grandchildren: how to die well.

How do we die well? Our culture prepares well for birth; we go to the doctor every month to receive pre-natal care. We plan for the birth process with Lamaze classes and a shower to prepare for items needed to facilitate a smooth transition for new life. Do we prepare for our own earthly departure as we are birthed into eternal life? How can we prepare for this transition?

We are a very death-denying society and, at times our culture and media play on unrealistic expectations surrounding the dying process. In the media, a grieving person is shown on a television actively grieving for about 40 seconds. Anyone who has lost a loved one knows this is untrue, but our culture continues to promote unrealistic concepts of death. The best way to approach our preparation for death may be embracing a more holistic way that includes the spiritual, physical, and emotional dimension.

First, we can prepare for death in a spiritual way. There are many helpful resources to facilitate a life review. What do we hold important as our greatest achievements? What regrets do we have? What do we want to pass on to our children, and their children, that reflects our dearest values? Some Jewish older adults write a living ethical will. They meet and write out the morals and values which are important to them, and pass them on to their children in honor of their memory.

Healing and forgiveness in our relationships with God, family, friends and our community may be in order, to help us free ourselves of any burdens. The reception of the sacrament of reconciliation and the anointing of the sick is beneficial. Attendance at a program on how to prepare the funeral liturgy helps families plan in advance; many parishes offer them and they are well attended.

In addition, a better understanding of why we are buried in a Catholic cemetery can be helpful. How does the Order of Christian Funerals speak to our loved ones after we are gone? Establishing a relationship between a funeral director is helpful before the "hour of our death." The most loving gift we can give our family is some instruction on what we want and who we want to carry that out for us.

*Are we up to the
challenge of
preparing for our
death and giving
that gift?*

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

- 1 Give the Gift of Dying Well to Your Loved Ones
- 2 Message from the President
- 2 Good Death
- 3 Dates to Remember
- 4 The Use of Rituals in Grief Support
- 5 Five Spiritual Lessons of Loss
- 7 Understanding Death As a Part of Life
- 9 Giving Our Deaths To Our Loved Ones
- 10 Video: A Helpful Companion for the Bereaved
- 10 NCMB Remembers...
- 12 Membership Information

Continued

DATES TO REMEMBER

**Saturday, November 13 -
Sunday, November 14,
2004**

**Ministry of Consolation
Training**

Conway, Arkansas

Contact Kathy Kordsmeier at
501-269-1998, 501-679-4317,
or kpsyex@cyberback.com.

**Saturday, February 12,
2005**

Bereavement Retreat

Cincinnati, Ohio

Good Shepherd Parish

Contact Kathy Teipen at 513-
489-7489 or
TeipenKM@aol.com.

**Friday, February 4 -
Sunday, February 6, 2005**

**Ministry of Consolation
Training**

Scranton, Pennsylvania

Contact Mary Ann Paulukonis
at 570-207-2213 or Mary-Ann-
Paulukonis@dioceseofscranton.org

"Give the Gift" continued from page 1

Can we prepare physically for death? Yes, by having a clear understanding of Advance Directives, a form giving your wishes concerning future health care and having them clearly articulated on paper. Choosing someone trustworthy who is aware of our requests and values is critical. Who will make your end of life decisions for you? Have a heartfelt conversation with the person you designate to carry out these decisions for you prior to a life-threatening illness. We can make ourselves aware of the church's stance on feeding tubes, life saving equipment or other decisions that we as individuals and our loved ones may have to make on our behalf. Services such as hospice can support our care and our family, and after death can comfort and provide compassionate care for those we leave behind.

Emotionally, we can prepare by asking ourselves what are our deepest fears? What will happen to us? Is it the fear of the unknown or leaving our family members? Can we put closure on our relationships here and embrace the transcendent? There will be a flood of emotions when we realize we are to die. If we are able to identify the most important people and things to us now, we will be able to focus our limited energies on that which is most important to us.

As Mary Frohlich puts it, "In facing death, the individual confronts the ultimate humiliation of his or her own demise and the ultimate challenge to affirm the goodness of the whole life, self and cosmos even in the face of death." Are we up to the challenge of preparing for our death and giving that gift?



Betsy Knestrick is program coordinator for older adult ministry and bereavement ministry, Department for Marriage and Family Ministry for the Cleveland Diocese.

One of the benefits of membership in NCMB is a subscription to *Journey*. See Membership.